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## **A Qualitative Analysis of Boosters and Hedges in Pakistani Print Media Discourse on Climate Change**

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### **Abstract:**

This study aims to explore the role of boosters and hedges as pragmatic-linguistic devices in newspaper articles on climate change. This study analyzes the language used in newspaper articles concerning climate change and focuses on linguistic devices such as boosters and hedges. To examine the selected texts, this research uses 'Positive Discourse Analysis' and 'Metadiscourse Analysis.' Hyland's (1998; 2017) metadiscourse framework has been used to analyze boosters and hedges in the selected texts on climate change. Those phrases with implicit or explicit boosters and hedges have been focused on viewing the role of these linguistic devices. The findings reveal that hedges express caution and skepticism whereas, boosters intensify the statements on climate change and serve as devices for creating certainty, emphasizing responsibility, and enhancing authenticity. Boosters and hedges also influence information on climate change. 'Positive Discourse Analysis' of the selected texts reveals these articles highlight the severity and urgency of climate change and contribute to awareness of hopeful solutions. The findings of this research are expected to benefit the concerned policymakers, journalists, students of linguistics and the audience of the newspapers.

**Keywords:** Pakistani print media, hedges, boosters, metadiscourse, positive discourse analysis, media discourse, climate change

### **INTRODUCTION**

Climate change has been extensively studied and talked about in developed countries, especially in the Western world. Many researchers have analyzed the way language is used to frame discussions and influence public opinion (Doulton & Brown, 2009; Grundmann, 2022). However, there has been

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less focus on the unique linguistic nuances found in non-Western regions. Pakistan is facing the impact of adverse climate change. The country has experienced climate-related disasters such as heatwaves, droughts and floods, which have made it even more important to understand how language is used in Pakistani newspaper articles to convey the gravity of these environmental challenges.

Climate change has been examined by researchers in diverse fields. Linguistic investigation of the phenomenon focusing on linguistic devices such as boosters and hedges is expected to manifest how language is utilised in conveying specific content. It seems important to investigate the consequences of the use of specific boosters and hedges in Pakistani newspaper articles on climate change. Linguistic analysis of the newspaper articles is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of climate change and its portrayal.

This research examines how climate change is portrayed in Pakistani English newspaper articles to identify linguistic strategies employed in climate change reporting in the socio-cultural context of Pakistan. This study particularly focuses on boosters and hedges used in newspaper articles to investigate how language is used to report climate change. The explorations can facilitate an understanding of the role of boosters and hedges in affecting public opinion. The study also expects to promote interdisciplinary dialogue between linguistics, journalism and climate sciences.

The present research explores the answers to the following research questions; How do newspaper articles use boosters and hedges to make a statement concerning climate change? How do the boosters and hedges shape the framing of climate change? What can be the possible effects of boosters and hedges on creating a positive linguistic impression?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Boosters and hedges serve as linguistic markers that express cautiousness or confidence respectively in a discourse. Hedges are linguistic devices and writers use them to express a varied softer version instead of stating facts whereas boosters are used to express conviction. Wang and Tatiana (2016) emphasize the arching role of hedges in conveying certainty and mitigating claims. An understanding of boosters and hedges as linguistic markers provides insight into their usage patterns in specific contexts for predefined purposes. Wellstead and Young (2011) opine that both linguistic and visual communication play a vital role in shaping public perceptions of climate change and that both visual and textual content need to be analysed to understand climate discourse. Ojo (2020) empirically investigated cross-cultural variations of boosters and hedges and their significance in conveying editorial attitudes and opinions. Ojo (2020) finds that the use of these linguistic markers in newspaper editorials reflects editorial stances and persuasive strategies. Mass media, especially newspapers, frame their discourse on climate change both visually and linguistically to influence public opinion and policy formulation and implementation.

Various researches are available on boosters and hedges in the existing literature in other disciplines. Mirzapour and Mahand (2012) compared the use of boosters and hedges in the fields of library, information technology and computer science. The results of their investigation reveal that articles authored by L1 native writers have a greater frequency of boosters and hedges and that there are sheer differences in the usage of boosters and hedges between L1 native and non-native writers. After investigating eight different academic disciplines, Takimoto (2015) finds that

disciplinary norms influence writers' use of boosters and hedges. Takimoto (2015) further views that authors on Philosophy use both boosters and hedges more frequently than those of other disciplines in humanities, social sciences and natural sciences.

Some researchers explored the use of boosters and hedges in research articles authored by non-native authors. Batool, Majeed and Zahra (2019) used corpus-based methods to analyze patterns and variations in the use of boosters and hedges. Mallaki, Ebrahimi and Farvardin (2023) studied academic research articles related to medical and teaching fields by Iranian and non-native English authors to explore the use of boosters and hedges. Mallaki, Ebrahimi and Farvardin's (2023) findings reveal significant differences in the use of hedges, but not in boosters, and that the non-native authors are found using hedges incorrectly. Mujiyanto (2021) studied boosters and hedges in the political content and investigated boosters and hedges used by Trump and Clinton in the 2016 US presidential debates, and found that Trump used more boosters and Clinton employed more hedges in their speeches and debates.

The literature review reveals the existence of previous studies on the use of boosters and hedges in various fields of humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. These linguistic markers reflect cultural nuances and shape perspectives. Comprehensive linguistic explorations are needed to gain an insightful understanding of their function in diverse contexts, cross-cultural studies, genre-specific analyses, etc. The present research analyzes the use of boosters and hedges in newspaper articles on climate change to identify different perspectives expressed through boosters and hedges. Moreover, the present research focuses on exploring the linguistic dynamics involved in climate change reporting in Pakistani newspaper articles. This research also explores the unique communication used in Pakistani newspaper articles while addressing the global concern of climate change and its repercussions.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research analyzes boosters and hedges in Pakistani print media discourse on climate change. The data has been taken from newspaper articles published in leading English newspapers: Dawn and The News. This research analyzes boosters and hedges, which respectively show uncertainty or certainty. The use of these linguistic devices is also being examined pragmatically with a qualitative approach. The researchers have collected the data from newspaper articles during the year 2022 from two premier Pakistani English newspapers: Dawn and The News newspapers. The analysis focuses on identifying the use of boosters and hedges, by using Hyland's (1998; 2017) metadiscourse framework. The framework's application aligns with the metadiscourse analysis theory, which helps in the extraction of relevant data from a certain discourse.

The research is based on an adapted theoretical framework based on Hyland's (1998; 2017) metadiscourse framework and Martin's (2004) Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) to examine how climate change is portrayed in newspaper articles in Pakistan. Metadiscourse, as proposed by Hyland (1998; 2017), is important in understanding the practical use of language, particularly the use of boosters and hedges, in formulating the discussion on climate change. The focus is on how authors of newspaper articles guide readers, express their position, and use rhetorical strategies. The present research, thus, highlights the interactive and evaluative nature of metadiscourse. Besides metadiscourse analysis, the present research also uses Martin's (2004) Positive Discourse

Analysis (PDA) to explore positivity in the newspaper discourse on climate change. The use of 'Metadiscourse' and PDA together is expected to offer a strong foundation for understanding the complexities of language use and highlighting the framing of a topic. This hybrid approach has been used to ensure a comprehensive analysis of boosters and hedges in the selected climate change discourse.

## ANALYSIS

This study mainly comprises a pragmatic-linguistic analysis of boosters and hedges to identify the patterns and subtleties while reporting on climate change in Pakistani newspapers. The analysis also focuses on the use of boosters and hedges to identify the peculiar linguistic expressions employed in newspaper articles on climate change.

**Table 1.** Formulation and framing of hedges in climate change reporting.

<b>Hedges (compromiser, avoiding responsibility, diminisher, minimizer)</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Excerpts</b>
Can	Model verb	"Dealing with climate change news can be exhausting..."
May	Model verb	"We may choose to block out the apocalyptic news..."
May want	Phrase	"we may want to help but may not know"
flows from the truth as uncomfortable as the weather	Phrase	"The heatwave sweeping Pakistan flows from a truth as uncomfortable as the weather"
It's simple	Phrase	"It's simple. Greenhouse gases trap"
could see a cut	Model verb	"economic output could see a cut of 18 percent"
could ultimately reduce	Model verb	"could ultimately reduce annual GDP by 18pc"
Likely	Adverb	"will likely be lost due to climate change"
will be central to	Phrase	"will be central to"
Might	Model verb	"might capitalize"
We need	Phrase	"We need climate funds that are easy to access"
Needed	Verb	"Needed to plug severe capacity deficits"
Seems to	Verb	"Seems to hold true"
States that	Verb	"The report states that"
Many people	adverb	"many people in the flood-affected districts"

Several	adjective	"several edges or common wet paths"
More than	adverb	"More than"
Nearly	adverb	"Nearly to"
Seemed	verb	"Seemed to change"
Might	Model verb	"Might down the"
Perhaps	Model verb	"Perhaps it"
Not fit	adjective	"Not fit"
Needed to take	phrase	"Needed to take action"
of the view that	phrase	"She was of the view that"
Seemed	Noun	"seemed inevitable"
Needed to keep change	Noun phrase	"Needed to keep change"
Historically focused	phrase	"Historically focused"
Some countries	phrase	"Some countries suggest"
May be difficult	Model verb	"May be difficult"
There have been hints	phrase	"There have been hints"
May be helpful	Model verb	"May be helpful"
<b>Total: 31</b>		

(Data source: Pakistani English newspapers: Dawn and The News)

The newspaper article excerpts show the use of hedges as a strategic part of metadiscourse. Metadiscourse refers to language elements that help readers interpret the text, including boosters and hedges, and thus they are used in newspaper reporting on climate change discourse. In the context of climate change, hedges are used as a form of metadiscourse to navigate the sensitive subject matter. This practice allows authors to express their opinions and convey information while maintaining a level of caution and objectivity. The words "can be exhausting", "may choose", "may want", "may not know", "could see a cut" and "seems to hold" are known as hedges. These hedges are used to show that not all people may feel the same way about climate change news. These hedges create an impression of uncertainty and less assertiveness by using words like "may" and "might" which suggest that there are other possible ways to interpret the information. The authors

thus create an impression that they are open to different perspectives and they are not presenting their statements as absolute truths.

Additionally, phrases such as "It's simple", "according to researchers" and "seems to hold" are used to minimize the impact of the subject matter. These authors simplify or present the information from a subjective standpoint to make it more understandable to a broader audience. The writers employ these phrases to present the idea of climate change in a manner that is both straightforward and believable, making it appealing to readers who might not be well-versed in scientific terminology. Hyland's (1998; 2017) metadiscourse framework emphasizes the use of language by writers to engage with readers and influence their understanding of a text. The use of hedges in the excerpts creates an atmosphere of openness, acknowledging various perspectives and interpretations of climate change. The authors have skillfully balanced presenting information while being aware of the intricate and subjective nature of the subject matter.

Positive Discourse Analysis, as proposed by Martin (2004), is a type of discourse analysis that focuses on how language is used to create positive representations and promote certain ideologies. In the context of climate change discourse, the use of hedges such as "more than", "nearly", "needed to take action" and "strongly endorsed" serve as positive discourse strategies. These hedges frame the information in a way that emphasizes the urgency of the situation while encouraging readers to recognize the importance of taking action. Additionally, phrases such as "all this was possible" and "need to keep engaged" express a positive orientation toward progress and continued commitment to climate change initiatives. The use of the word "strongly" in the phrase "strongly endorsed" emphasizes the support for specific actions, conveying a sense of urgency and shared responsibility. These positive language tactics aim to inspire readers and stakeholders to play an active role in addressing climate change issues. The use of hedges in the newspaper article excerpts seems in line with both metadiscourse theory and positive discourse analysis. These hedges act as compromisers, diminishers, and minimizers within the metadiscourse framework, allowing for a nuanced and cautious expression of opinions. At the same time, these hedges serve as positive discourse strategies, framing the information in a way that encourages awareness, action, and a shared sense of responsibility in addressing the challenges posed by climate change.

**Table 2.** Formulation and framing of boosters in climate change reporting

<b>Boosters (intensifier, certainty authenticity)</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Excerpts</b>
continuously ranked	adverb	"Pakistan has been continuously ranked among the most affected countries by climate change"
only going to get worse	phrase	"these impacts are only going to get worse"
urgently required	adverb	"These efforts are urgently required..."
as aware citizens	adjective	"as aware citizens, need to demand action"
It's important	phrase	"it's important: save energy"

taking no prisoners	<i>phrase</i>	"climate change is here, and it is taking no prisoners"
should terrify us all	phrase	"heatwaves are now seasonal in Pakistan...should terrify us all"
must speak up	Model verb	"Pakistan must speak up"
It's only fair	adverb	"It's only fair. Their actions punish all of us"
it is critical to take measures	phrase	"it is critical to take measures against climate change"
represent the hope	phrase	"efficiently represent the hope to pull the country out of its economic distress"
it is crucial	phrase	"It is crucial for us to realize our complex relationship with ecology"
Reduce	verb	"heatwaves reduce agriculture and livestock yields, destroy infrastructure, sap labor productivity, and undermine health"
Sap	verb	"heatwaves reduce agriculture and livestock yields, destroy infrastructure, sap labor productivity, and undermine health"
Undermine	verb	"heatwaves reduce agriculture and livestock yields, destroy infrastructure, sap labor productivity, and undermine health"
Destroy	verb	"heatwaves reduce agriculture and livestock yields, destroy infrastructure, sap labor productivity, and undermine health"
Central to	verb	"Central to this year's UN climate change conference"
Agility and speed	verb	"Agility and speed"
All	adverb	"all its existing budgetary envelopes"
Always	adverb	"always been the stepchild of the larger discourse"
Must be	Model verb	"must be put on the climate finance agenda formally"
Advocating for loss and advantage	phrase	"advocating for 'loss and damage'"
The most	phrase	"The most horrifying and fatal of them all"
Cruel	verb	"Cruel Winters"
Highest level of flooding	phrase	"land affected during the highest level of flooding"

Improvising	verb	"improvising the COP presidency and United Nations"
Strengthen	verb	"strengthen our early warning systems"
Recently	adverb	"(IUCN) recently published a report"
Creatively	verb	"it creatively interprets the existing"
Greater role	adverb	"greater role for women in the development of climate solutions"
Particularly important	adverb	"Particularly important steps for climate change"
Significantly affect	adverb	"Significantly affect the nature"
Most vulnerable	phrase	"vulnerable populations, including women"
Highly impacted	adverb	"Highly impacted country in the world"
Largest number	adverb	"among the ten countries in the world with the largest number"
New	adjective	"outcome had nothing new to offer to reduce greenhouse gas"
Accelerate and intensify	phrase	"accelerate and intensify the actions and investments needed for a sustainable"
Central aim	phrase	"central aim is to strengthen the global response"
Must determine	phrase	"each country must determine, plan, and regularly report"
Window for	phrase	"it as they saw a window for climate financing"
Strong signal	phrase	"sent a strong signal to the global financial"
New vision	phrase	"the global financial system to define a new vision"
Seriously concerned	adjective	"Seriously concerned about the situation of climate change"
Ratchet mechanism	phrase	"should go beyond previous targets (ratchet mechanism)"
Gender transformative	phrase	"the report provides gender-transformative climate responses"
Key step	phrase	"Key steps need to"
will further aggravate	phrase	"will further aggravate Pakistan's economic fragility"
has already been understood"	phrase	"The dependence of humans on the ecosystems has already been understood"
This leads to a large impact and change	phrase	"of small steps implemented by many leads to a large impact and change"
Extreme	adjective	"Extreme heatwaves are now seasonal in Pakistan"



**Total: 50**

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(Data source: Pakistani English newspapers: Dawn and The News)

The excerpts from newspaper articles make use of boosters to emphasize certain information points. This practice is a form of metadiscourse, which refers to language elements that help guide readers' interpretation of a text. In the present data, boosters serve as intensifiers, adding a sense of certainty, responsibility, and authenticity to the statements being made about climate change, in line with Hyland's (1998; 2017) metadiscourse framework.

The expressions such as "continuously ranked among the most affected", "only going to get worse", "urgently required" and "it's important" are intensifiers that create an impression of certainty. These boosters emphasize the severity of climate change impacts on Pakistan and portray these impacts as inevitable. The newspaper article authors assert a high degree of certainty about the ongoing and future impacts of climate change by using phrases such as "continuously ranked" and "only going to get worse". According to metadiscourse theory, these intensifiers guide readers in understanding the gravity of a situation and frame it as an unquestionable reality.

The phrases "as aware citizens", "it's important" and "should terrify us all" are used to create a sense of responsibility and urgency. The term "as aware citizens" shows that the writers believe that informed individuals have the power to bring about change, making them responsible for tackling climate challenges. Expressions like "it's important" and "should terrify us all" intensify the call to action, compelling readers to recognize their role and responsibility in addressing climate change. These boosters guide readers to interpret the text with a sense of duty and urgency, aligning with metadiscourse theory.

In addition, the use of boosters in newspaper articles helps to make the information presented more credible. For instance, phrases like "according to researchers", "The most horrifying and fatal", and "recently" attribute the information to external sources or timeframes, making the statements more reliable. This use of metadiscourse is in line with Hyland's (1998; 2017) metadiscourse theory, which communicates to readers that the news is based on research or recent developments, thus reinforcing its authenticity.

According to Martin's (2004) Positive Discourse Analysis, the selected excerpts use boosters to shape positive representations and promote specific ideologies related to climate change. Expressions like "save energy", "leads to a significant impact and change" and "represent hope" are examples of positive discourse strategies that emphasize the potential for improvement. These boosters contribute to a positive outlook, encouraging readers to see individual and collective actions as impactful and hopeful.

In addition, the language used in phrases like "accessible and reliable transfers", "utilizing all available funding" and "playing a crucial role in the upcoming UN climate change conference" serves as a booster, highlighting positive qualities or actions. This phenomenon creates a positive image of climate funds, government initiatives and conferences, portraying them as desirable and effective. This optimistic discourse is in line with Martin's (2004) PDA framework, which suggests that language is used to construct positive representations and promote a favourable outlook on climate-related efforts.

To sum up, the boosters mentioned in the newspaper article extracts have been analyzed by using the metadiscourse theory and positive discourse analysis. The purpose of these boosters is to intensify the statements about climate change. These boosters create a sense of certainty, responsibility, and authenticity, which helps the readers understand the text with a greater awareness of the urgency and positive potential for change in the face of climate challenges.

## CONCLUSION

After analyzing the selected texts through the lenses of metadiscourse framework and positive discourse analysis, it is found that the use of boosters and hedges shapes the discourse on climate change in Pakistani newspapers. The use of hedges, as proposed by Hyland (1998; 2017), is a metadiscursive tool that helps navigate the sensitive subject matter, allowing authors to express opinions with caution and objectivity. Hedges such as "may" and "might" foster an atmosphere of openness, acknowledging diverse perspectives and interpretations. Meanwhile, Martin's (2004) 'Positive Discourse Analysis' framework uncovers positive discourse strategies within hedges, emphasizing urgency and shared responsibility to inspire action.

On the other hand, boosters serve as intensifiers, adding certainty, responsibility, and authenticity to statements about climate change, aligning with Hyland's (1998; 2017) framework. The boosters, analyzed through the lens of PDA contribute to a positive outlook, portraying individual and collective actions as impactful and hopeful. Both boosters and hedges are used to create a positive linguistic impression. Boosters are used to intensify the conveyed content whereas hedges are used to mitigate the delivered information concerning climate change. Through their intensifying role, boosters emphasize addressing the issues of climate change. Together, these boosters and hedges illustrate a skilful balance between cautious expression and positive framing, reinforcing the need for urgency, responsibility, and collective action in addressing the challenges posed by climate change in the Pakistani context.

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